

Powers Just Ordinary Boy in School Years

STATINTL

Johnson City, Tenn., Aug. 17 (Special)—The class of 1950 at Milligan college here, then living in the hamlet of Pound, Va., near the Kentucky border.

regarded Francis Gary Powers as a likeable young man apt to be moderately successful in the adult world.

There was no hint in his background that within a decade he would become the central figure in a world crisis. His classmates knew him as a shy, pleasant youth, better than average but a long way from the top in scholarship and athletic ability.

Had they been asked, several of them said recently, they would never have voted for Powers as the man most likely to become the first identified American aerial spy.

Born in Jenkins, Ky.

Powers, now 30, was born in Jenkins, Ky., to a family of modest means. His father, Oliver, was a cobbler.

The father remembers that Francis was 14 when he first displayed an interest in flying. Father and son passed an airport in Princeton, W. Va., where a sign offered a ride in a light plane for \$2.50. The boy wheedled this sum from his father and took his first flight. When it was over he told his father he had decided to become a pilot.

Powers attended high school in Grundy, Va., where he played football and was graduated in the upper half of his class. He ranked 22d in a class of 69. He developed skill as a tinkerer with motors and automobiles.

Helped Pay Expenses

In September, 1946, he arrived in Johnson City to enroll at Milligan college, a co-educational school of about 500 students operated by the Christian church. He chose a pre-medical course with a major in biology and a minor in chemistry. He had a job with a campus maintenance crew to help defray his expenses.

In each of his four years at Milligan, Powers won a letter in track, specializing in the 220 and 440 yard dashes. He took little part in campus sports. He usually went home on weekends, hitchhiking 110 miles each way. His parents were

Average C Plus

He was graduated in June, 1950, again in the upper half of his class—22d in a class of 59. His average for the four years was C plus with his best grades in biology, chemistry, and mathematics. Said one of his professors: "He couldn't be pushed. He had a certain speed of understanding and he moved along at that speed."

One of his classmates, Thomas Hagy, now principal of the elementary school in Richlands, Va., said of Powers. "He was a good friend. When I came back from the army I was rusty on my math. He helped me and the other GI boys."

Powers enlisted in the air force as a private in October, 1950, and was discharged as a corporal in November, 1951. He then entered the air force pilot training program at the Greenville air force base. He was commissioned a second lieutenant in the air force reserve in December, 1952, and sent to Williams air force base, Chandler, Ariz., for advanced training. He completed a jet training course in 1953 and was assigned as pilot of an F-84 with the 468th strategic fighter squadron at Turner Air force base, near Albany, Ga.

Became Test Pilot

His air force service was honorable but undistinguished. He made one short duty trip to Japan but otherwise saw no overseas service and was never in combat. With others on active duty at the time of the Korean war he was awarded the national defense service medal.

While stationed near Albany, he met and married Miss Barbara Brown, a girl from Milledgeville, Ga. He resigned from the air force in May, 1956, to take a job as test pilot with the Lockheed Aircraft corporation, apparently attracted by the high salaries paid test pilots. His assignment by Lockheed to a base in Turkey set the stage for his spectacular emergence from anonymity.